

## CHURCH TIMES

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## Missiles &amp; morals

THE current outcry against President Reagan's decision to develop the neutron "bomb" (it is actually warheads on missiles) is caused basically by the fact that it would be easier to decide to use these tactical weapons than to unleash the present strategic nuclear armoury. The terrors of modern war have in that way come nearer. Civilian casualties and the devastation of urbanised areas would be limited; the aggressor's tank-led infantry would be halted and (often after a delay) killed; and the risk of the destruction of American cities as retaliation for this action against the Red Army in Western Europe, the Middle East or another theatre of war might be judged tolerable by those who would have to make the decision to use weapons which at present are to be kept within the USA.

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Because the new invention would be attractive only for those on the defensive against an invasion, and because its use would be less destructive than the use of the nuclear weapons which are the existing alternatives, we have found it impossible to conclude that the moral case against such a development is so strong as to be decisive. We of course respect both pacifists who think all military technology impermissible, and pragmatists such as ex-President Carter who have been convinced that this particular monstrosity is unnecessary. But, in the aftermath of the invasion of Afghanistan, the demand for a more effective deterrent which has prevailed in the White House is understandable.

Recent pleas for arms-reduction, including the removal of all nuclear missiles from European soil, are deeply attractive; and everyone must hope and pray that Mr. Haig and Mr. Gromyko are able to arrange creative talks — partly because the prospect of Cruise missiles arriving from America in December, 1983, as a counter-threat to the Soviet SS-20 missiles has been seriously damaging NATO unity.

There is some hope that the present US Administration may be growing more favourably disposed to the idea of arms-reduction now that it has done its sums for its defence budget. It may be prepared to modify the previous insistence on on-site inspection in Warsaw Pact countries because of the immense advances recently made in reconnaissance by satellites in space. But, if the professed Soviet willingness to free Europe of nuclear weapons is sincere, the greatest problem remains that NATO cannot at present rely on its "conventional" weapons to remove any temptation to aggression, yet cannot persuade popularly elected governments to provide the finance (let alone the compulsory military service) needed in order to get anywhere near "conventional" parity with the Warsaw Pact.

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Although the advocacy of greater defence expenditure goes very oddly with the generally shared ideal of general disarmament, the whole peace movement needs to learn the hard lesson that, for non-pacifists, the allaying of fears and temptations by adequate but limited deterrence or defence is itself a contribution to peace. Everyone knows how badly the money is needed for nobler purposes, but many more non-nuclear anti-tank weapons may well be necessary for an alliance which believes itself to be under threat from the East. The latest technology is expensive, but does promise weapons which would destroy aggressive tanks and not the whole of civilisation.

## All good gifts around us

By MARGARET WALLIS

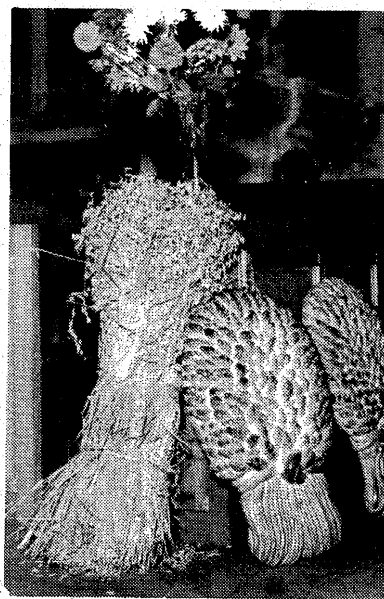
HARVEST Festival is one of my favourite festivals. For sheer colour and vitality you cannot beat it. My only objection is that it does not come more often, and I cannot see why it should always take place in late September/early October.

At this time (along with others of the urban peasantry) I am enjoying a little personal respite between the two most difficult harvests of the year: the Strawberry Harvest of June/July and the Brussels Sprout Harvest, which begins in November and can last as long as late March. So time-consuming and back-breaking are both of these that any day I would sooner drive a tractor or take long siestas beneath bales of straw and a September sky.

It is just these associations—September skies, golden corn, Canaan's pleasant land, etc.—that make harvest such an attractive festival. Yet even such halycon images cannot mask the fact that there is always at harvest-tide a conflict, deep-rooted and intractable, between realists and traditionalists.

This was never more clearly brought home to me than at a meeting I once attended, convened to discuss the harvest edition of the parish magazine. The cover was the sticking-point. Various suggestions had been put forward: a lino-cut marrow, a spray of Michaelmas daisies, a harvest loaf . . . all had been rejected. Suddenly the senior curate's eyes glazed over, and, like Cortez on Darien, he seemed in the throes of some great discovery.

"I know," he said, "TINS. We'll have a great big pile of TINS on the cover. That's what food's all about these days. We don't plough or scatter—it's all in TINS."



Harvest loaves will be a familiar sight in many churches over the next two or three weeks: but do they present the right image for the 1980s?

There was a sort of uncomfortable silence. Someone coughed. Feet shifted. One or two people became almost tearful at the thought of a Warhol-type arrangement of tins blazoning mass-production and the twentieth century from our magazine—which should of course have been folksy and harvesty and faintly medieval. Eventually the idea was dropped and I believe something more in-

nocuous substituted, along the lines of a basket of apples.

Of course that would not happen now, in the 1980s. No one would dare suggest that tinned food was anything other than a travesty of the real thing (whilst secretly keeping up the stocks of baked beans in the larder). Thus the conflict is latent; and, meanwhile, Harvest Festival has come into its own again (along with whole foods, folk-medicine and earth-motherhood) to the extent of being accorded proper status in the ASB—where, I see, there is even an instruction for people to dress in the "colour of the season."

There is no doubt that having all that food, perishable or otherwise, in the church poses considerable problems. Theft, of course, is one. I remember going to a strange church one day, unaware that it was their Harvest Festival. Before the service I had popped into a newsagent nearby for a paper and a carton of long-life milk.

As the service progressed, it occurred to me that, if I went out with the milk, people would quite likely think I had pinched it from the stocks of tins and packets all around. Eventually I became so pre-occupied and embarrassed about this possibility that, when the service ended, I left the milk under the seat — and, for all I know, it is there still.

The other problem is what to do with everything when the service

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## Easier said than done?

DARE I say that prayer has failed Christianity? The fact that I am a poor pray-er may colour my view, but I do feel that the advice "to pray" or to say "I am praying for you" is meaningless to thousands of people. Indeed the word "pray" is possibly over-used, and often I now say "think" instead.

I quote from a leader in the *Church Times*:—"The most important reason why nearly 90 per cent. of the English do not attend church regularly is that they do not think it worthwhile to pray to God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit . . . and this has never once been discussed in General Synod in any worthy depth." That this should be so in a world full of poverty, sadness and violence is perhaps a sad commentary on our Church priorities.

And yet legions of small prayer groups are being set up and are indeed flourishing, and I'm sure that the praying orders of our monks and nuns must have done some good. There are thirty-eight references to "prayer" in my King James Bible Concordance, so we must take it seriously.

People, however, must judge a medium by its efficacy; and, if their cries of anguish and petition are unanswered (and to many people this is the case), Christians must accept this fact and try to give better explanations. The answer that it may be "Yes, no or wait" is not enough, and the threatening clergy answer I read of a few weeks ago, "You'll get a positive answer if you're prepared to accept the consequences," certainly wouldn't comfort many people I know.

Does God need our prayers? After all, he is our great divine Father who created us and could destroy us if he so chose. Anyway, let us break down our prayer as was (is?) taught in the old Church schools, the formula P.A.C.T.S.

"P" is preparation. Often there's no time in certain situa-

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tions, so would God be bothered if it was missed?

"A" is adoration. Is it necessary to address God in exaggerated, idolising terms? Could it not be a faintly embarrassing situation—as I should feel if my daughters addressed me so?

"C" is confession. Now God knows what we've done wrong, and we usually know soon after we've done it and hopefully have repented. Surely repetition at the end of the day isn't going to make God any more attentive or forgiving?

"T" is thanksgiving. All the good things in life are definitely worth being grateful for; but how can one convince, for example, a poor Vietnamese that he could be even worse-off? That his happy-ever-after is assured because Christ died for him is not the kind of assurance he seeks.

Also consider two persons who have prayed for their loved ones

to be healed, and one is disappointed. Can the other happily and sensitively thank God for this answer in the company of the sad, unfulfilled one?

"S" is supplication. Two persons I respect told me we could do without this type of prayer when they gave up trying to convince me of its effectiveness. The stumbling-block has always been the feeling that one may be trying to alter God's will. One sage tells us to pray carefully and non-trivially; another tells us to spill the lot—e.g., "Please let City win on Saturday."

Then again, why should I ask God to bless, for example, the work of the Bishop of Saskatchewan? If he's doing his job properly, he'll have God's blessing anyway. That's not to say that the Bishop will not feel and work better if he knows he's in the thoughts of many people at a particular time. That, however, need not necessarily be via God. A group of agnostics can so give a psyche-boost to their fellow-men.

I may be accused of being a much-confused Christian, and I won't argue, but there must be many thousands in the same position. Indeed I'm still happily in the Church and have much to be thankful for. Again, I trust I've not shocked too many of my Christian friends, but, like Luther, "Here I stand; I can no other; so help me, God."

On a final note, couldn't the Lord's Prayer, the only one Christ gave us, be sufficient for our needs—especially "Thy will be done"? I still pray, but perhaps more in hope than in faith at present.